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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the training of department heads to be administrators. Some of the suggestions discussed are to increase their pay and time to do the job, let them share in decision-making, provide specialized training, and expose them to all levels of administration. The paper concludes that many good principals do not achieve their potential because they fail to recognize and enhance the role of department heads in their schools. (Author/LD)

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DEVELOPING THE DEPARTMENT HEAD ROLE - FROM COLLEAGUE TO LEADER

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DEVELOPING THE DEPARTMENT HEAD ROLE - FROM COLLEAGUE TO LEADER

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I HAVE SOME VERY STRONG BIASES ABOUT THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEADS AND RATHER THAN DISCUSS THE ROLE IN GENERAL TERMS, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE SOME OF THESE BIASES WITH YOU.

FIRST, IF YOUR SCHOOL IS LARGE ENOUGH TO WARRANT DEPARTMENT HEADS, YOU HAVE AN ORGANIZATION WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF COMPLEXITY THAT REQUIRES THAT YOU HAVE ASSISTANCE IN MEETING THE ADMINISTRATIVE DEMANDS WHICH YOU FACE. MUCH OF THAT ASSISTANCE WILL COME FROM DEPARTMENT HEADS. THAT MEANS, IN MY OPINION, THAT DEPARTMENT HEADS ARE "ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATORS " AND THAT IS A KEY ASSUMPTION THAT COLORS MY VIEW OF THE POSITION.

IN DEFINING THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEAD AS ADMINISTRATIVE, ONE OF MY BIASES IS THAT WE MUST ELIMINATE THE DIVIDED LOYALTIES WHICH TRADITIONALLY GO WITH THE POSITION, THAT IS STOP THE PRACTICE OF ALLOWING DEPARTMENT HEADS TO BE MEMBERS OF THE TEACHERS' BARGAINING UNIT. I HAVE NEVER UNDERSTOOD NOR ACCEPTED THE APPARENT COMFORT WITH WHICH MANY PRINCIPALS ACCEPT THESE DIVIDED LOYALTIES BECAUSE THE CONFLICT IS SO BASIC AS TO MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO EFFECTIVELY CARRY OUT SUCH RESPONSIBILITIES AS SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION OF STAFF WHICH USUALLY ARE A PART OF THE DEPARTMENT HEAD'S JOB. I RECOGNIZE THAT PULLING DEPARTMENT HEADS OUT OF THE TEACHER UNIONS IS NO SMALL TASK. THE DEPARTMENT HEADS WON'T LIKE IT, AT LEAST INITIALLY, BECAUSE THE PEER RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR STAFFS IS A LOT MORE COMFORTABLE THAN WILL BE POSSIBLE IF THEY ARE VIEWED AS ADMINISTRATORS. THE TEACHERS WON'T LIKE IT BECAUSE THE CHANGE IN ROLE IS EASILY VIEWED AS A THREAT; FURTHER, TEACHER UNIONS HAVE OFTEN LOST THEIR BEST LEADERS WHEN DEPARTMENT HEADS

HAVE BEEN REMOVED. FINALLY, BOARDS OF EDUCATION WON'T LIKE IT SINCE IT WILL PROBABLY COST MONEY. BOARDS ARE ALSO OFTEN OVERLY CONCERNED WITH PUBLIC REACTION TO "TOP HEAVY ADMINISTRATION."

SO, DEAR COLLEAGUES, IN ORDER TO REDEFINE THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEADS, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE SOME BIG FIGHTS ON YOUR HANDS. THE RESULTS, HOWEVER, DICTATE THAT WE BE WILLING TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT. THE RESULTS I'M TALKING ABOUT ARE DAY-TO-DAY SUPERVISION OF OUR TEACHERS, IN A POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE SENSE; EVALUATION OF STAFF THAT IS MORE THAN THE PERFUNCTORY VISIT ONCE A YEAR TO MEET THE STIPULATIONS OF THE MASTER CONTRACT; PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION ~~WOULD~~ THAT BECOMES A REALITY RATHER THAN A WISH.

OK, WHAT ARE SOME STEPS THAT NEED TO BE TAKEN TO OVERCOME THE NEGATIVE REACTIONS WHICH YOU CAN EXPECT ? FIRST, YOU NEED TO SELL THE DEPARTMENT HEADS, AND THE BEST WAY TO DO THAT IS WITH SOME INCENTIVES - INCENTIVES THAT ARE ATTRACTIVE TO THEM AND GOOD FOR THE SCHOOL. NUMBER ONE INCENTIVE IS, NOT SUPRISINGLY, MONEY. IF WE WANT OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS TO BE ADMINISTRATORS WE HAVE TO BEGIN PAYING THEM AS ADMINISTRATORS. GET THEM OFF THE TEACHERS' SALARY SCHEDULE AND ESTABLISH SALARY RANGES THAT ARE CLEARLY ABOVE THOSE OF THE TEACHERS. IN MY OWN CASE, DEPARTMENT HEADS AVERAGE $2400 ABOVE TEACHERS SALARIES. SECOND, GIVE YOUR ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATORS THE TIME TO DO THE JOB. ALL TOO OFTEN, WE GIVE THEM AN "EXTRA" FREE PERIOD TO DO THE JOB. BY SO DOING, WE CERTAINLY DEFINE THE LIMITS OF WHAT WE CAN EXPECT. DEPARTMENT HEADS AT GILFORD EACH SUPERVISE TWELVE STAFF, AND TEACH TWO PERIODS OUT OF SEVEN, WITHOUT ALL 12 EXTRA DAYS ANY ASSIGNMENTS TO STUDY HALLS. OBVIOUSLY, MY EXPECTATIONS OF THEM MATCH THE GOOD CHUNK OF TIME WHICH WE HAVE MADE AVAILABLE TO THEM. A THIRD INCENTIVE FOR DEPARTMENT HEADS IS A REAL SHARING IN THE DECISION_MAKING, ACCOMPLISHED BY MOVING AWAY FROM THE TRADITIONAL "ADVISORY COUNCIL" MODEL TO A TRUE ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM APPROACH. NOW, IN ADDITION TO TIME AND MONEY, YOU ARE OFFERING POWER, POWER THAT IS RELATED TO THE TOTAL OPERATION OF

THE SCHOOL, NOT POWER SIMPLY LIMITED TO DEPARTMENTAL FUNCTIONS. ANOTHER BENEFIT WHICH ACCRUES TO THE SCHOOL IS THAT YOU WILL BEGIN TO BREAK DOWN THE DIVISIVENESS WHICH RESULTS FROM THE PAROCHIAL INTERESTS IN THE TRADITIONAL DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURE. PROBLEMS BECOME SHARED PPOBLEMS, AND THE SOLUTIONS THE RESULT OF TALENTS AND INSIGHTS FROM A LARGER GROUP. IN MY OWN CASE, I FOUND THAT THE COMBINATION OF THESE INCENTIVES - MONEY, TIME, AND POWER - WERE ENOUGH TO EARN SUFFICIENT SUPPORT FROM DEPARTMENT HEADS TO GIVE THE NEW STRUCTURE A TRY. THAT MINIMAL SUPPORT IS ALL THAT WAS NEEDED TO GET STARTED. ACTUALLY EXPERIENCING THE INCENTIVES HAS BROUGHT ABOUT INCREASING SUPPORT.

EARNING THE SUPPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT HEADS IS CRUCIAL TO EARNING THE SUPPORT OF THE BOARD. IT IS CERTAINLY ARGUABLE AS TO WHETHER YOU SHOULD START WITH THE DEPARTMENT HEADS OR WITH THE BOARD

IN ADDITION TO INCENTIVES, THERE ARE SOME OTHER PRACTICAL STEPS THAT ALSO NEED TO BE TAKEN. THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE IS TO PROVIDE TRAINING FOR OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS SO THAT THEY CAN MEET OUR EXPECTATIONS. JUST LOOK AT THE TRAINING- OR LACK OF IT- THAT MOST OF US HAVE HAD IN SUPERVISION, EVALUATION, DECISION-MAKING, TIME MANAGEMENT, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION. IF WE HAVE BEEN POORLY PREPARED, AND IT IS MY BIAS THAT THIS IS THE CASE, THE MAJORITY OF DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN ARE TOTALLY LACKING IN PREPARATION. MOST OF US HAVE LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCE. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT BEING A "GOOD" TEACHER HAS NOT NECESSARILY PREPARED US TO BE "GOOD" ADMINISTRATORS. WHILE I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE WANT INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN QUALITY TEACHERS, I WANT US TO RECOGNIZE OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROVIDING TRAINING IN THE WIDE RANGE OF SKILLS REQURIED TO BE A QUALITY ADMINISTRATOR. AT GILFORD, WE HAVE STRUCTURED OUR OWN IN-SERVICE

ACTIVITIES FOR OUR ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM, RATHER THAN SEND OUR PERSONNEL OFF TO THE CAMPUSES. IN THIS WAY, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO IDENTIFY OUR OWN UNIQUE NEEDS AND PROVIDE IN-SERVICE TO MATCH. WE HAVE, FOR INSTANCE, BROUGHT IN CONSULTANTS FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO ASSIST US IN DECISION-MAKING AND GROUP PROCESS SKILLS SO NECESSARY TO THE OPERATION OF A TEAM APPROACH. IN AUGUST, WE SPENT TWO DAYS WITH A CONSULTANT FROM DARTMOUTH COLLEGE LEARNING TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND EXPLORING THE NEEDS OF OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS IN SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION OF STAFF. WE ARE CURRENTLY WORKING ON A MODEL FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT THAT WILL EVENTUALLY SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR IN-SERVICE FOR THE ENTIRE STAFF.

ANOTHER STEP WHICH I RECOMMEND IS TO BROADEN THE EXPOSURE OF DEPARTMENT HEADS TO FAMILIARIZE THEM WITH ALL LEVELS OF ADMINISTRATION. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FREQUENT EXPOSURE TO THE POLITICS OF DEALING WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD. PROVIDE FOR DIRECT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DEPARTMENT HEADS AND CENTRAL OFFICE PERSONNEL. PROVIDE FOR FREQUENT CONTACTS WITH THE PUBLIC. BY SO BROADENING THEIR EXPOSURE, YOU WILL BE EXPANDING THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMPLETE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION. THIS SHOULD LEAD TO A GREATER UNDERSTANDING ON THEIR PART OF YOUR ROLE AS PRINCIPAL AND OF THE COMPLEXITIES THAT ACCOMPANY THAT ROLE. ULTIMATELY, THIS EXPOSURE SHOULD LEAD TO A GREATER SYMPATHY AND EMPATHY BETWEEN AND AMONG THE VARIOUS LEVELS OF ADMINISTRATION. SYMPAHTY AND EMPATHY ARE STRONG STUFF AND CAN DO MUCH TO CEMENT THE TEAM RELATIONSHIP AMONG ADMINISTRATORS.

IN SUMMARIZING MY FEELINGS ABOUT THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEADS, I DON'T THINK THAT WE SHOULD UNDERESTIMATE THEIR IMPORTANCE. IT IS NO EXAGGERATION WHEN I TELL YOU THAT I HAVE SEEN GOOD PRINCIPALS ULTIMATELY FAIL TO MEET THEIR OWN POTENTIAL BECAUSE THEY NEVER LEARNED TO HARNESS THE STRONG FORCES WHICH GO WITH THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEAD. DECISIONS WOULD BE MADE, INFORMATION GIVEN, UNDERSTANDINGS ARRIVED AT THAT WERE NEVER

COMMUNICATED TO THE "TROOPS" BY THE "NONCOMS". ASSUMPTIONS WERE MADE THAT WITH THE TITLE OF DEPARTMENT HEAD WENT THE SKILLS TO DO THE JOB. THE REAL LACK OF THOSE SKILLS MEANT THAT GOOD SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION OF STAFF WERE LACKING, NOT BY INTENT, BUT SIMPLY BY OMMISSION OF THE REQUIRED SKILLS. COMPETITION FOR LIMITED RESOURCES WAS OFTEN DIVISIVE, WITH DEPARTMENTS OUT-GUNNING ONEANOTHER FOR A BIGGER "SLICE OF THE PIE." AND THROUGH ALL OF THIS, THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM CARRIED ON DAY TO DAY - SURVIVING. BUT NEITHER THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM NOR THE SCHOOL'S PERSONNEL EVER REACHED THEIR POTENTIAL. (WE MIGHT BETTER SAY THAT THE KIDS WERE NEVER ALLOWED TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL.) WHY ? BECAUSE THE INGREDIENTS REQUIRED WERE MISSING. DEPARTMENT HEADS WERE JUST COLLEAGUES, NOT LEADERS. AND WHO COULD HAVE CHANGED THIS ? THE PRINCIPAL. WHAT'S THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEAD IN YOUR SCHOOL ?

AS FAR AS THE SCHOOL BOARD IS CONCERNED, THE SELLING JOB SHOULD CENTER ON THE OUTCOMES WHICH THE BOARD WOULD LIKE TO SEE _ GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY OF THEIR TEACHERS. I HAVE YET TO WORK WITH A SCHOOL BOARD THAT WAS TOTALLY SATISFIED WITH THE QUALITY OF TEACHER EVALUATION PROVIDED THEM. WHAT WE NEED TO EDUCATE BOARDS ABOUT IS THE GREAT AMOUNT OF TIME IT TAKES TO DO THE JOB OF EVALUATION WELL. WE ALSO NEED TO EDUCATE OURSELVES AND THE BOARDS ON THE NEED FOR ON-GOING SUPERVISION OF OUR TEACHERS IN ADDITION TO EVALUATION. ON-GOING SUPERVISION MEANS DAILY CONTACT BETWEEN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS ON INSTRUCTIONAL MATTERS. IT MEANS BEING A FREQUENT VISITOR TO CLASSES, NOT JUST WHEN A TEACHER IS "IN TROUBLE". IT MEANS HAVING THE TIME FOR DEMONSTRATION TEACHING, FOR TEAMING WITH TEACHERS FOR A UNIT OR TWO. I'M AFRAID THAT TOO OFTEN BOARDS DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE NEED TO NURTURE GOOD TEACHING. WITH SUFFICIENT TIME, DEPARTMENT HEADS CAN DO IT.

SINCE THE CHANGE OF ROLE FOR MY DEPARTMENT HEADS AND GIVEN THE IN-SERVICE WHICH WE HAVE DONE ON BOTH A FORMAL AND INFORMAL BASIS, EVALUATION OF STAFF AT GILFORD HAS IMPROVED, AND IT HAS IMPROVED TO THE POINT THAT IT IS RECOGNIZED BY THE BOARD.

YOU MAY HAVE SOME SUCCESS ON APPROACHING THE MATTER WITH THE BOARD ON A FINANCIAL BASIS. SURE YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ADDITIONAL MONIES TO BETTER PAY DEPARTMENT HEADS. BUT WHAT IS THE FINANCIAL INVESTMENT THE BOARD IS MAKING IN ITS TEACHERS ? DOES THE BOARD FEEL IT'S GETTING ITS MONIES WORTH ? DOES THE BOARD FEEL THAT THERE ARE TEACHERS WHO ARE CAPABLE OF GROWTH, OF IMPROVEMENT ? DOESN'T THE BOARD WANT TO DO WHATEVER IT NEEDS TO DO TO EITHER HELP POOR TEACHERS IMPROVE OR TO GET RID OF THEM ? QUESTIONS LIKE THESE CAN HELP BRING THE BOARD AROUND TO THE RECOGNITION THAT THE INVESTMENT OF A A FEW THOUSAND DOLLARS ($8000 in my own case) CAN DO MUCH TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF A STAFF THAT MIGHT COST MORE THAN A MILLION DOLLARS.